

# The Company XO:

## A Commander's Letter of Welcome

**CAPTAIN BRIAN D. BARHAM**

What can a company commander do to ensure that his executive officer makes a rapid transition into the job and begins working on the priority projects right away?

We have all known lieutenants who had been outstanding platoon leaders but seemed to take forever to become adequate XOs. Some XOs never seem to be thinking the same way as their company commanders; some do outstanding work on projects that are secondary in importance while letting important tasks slip.

Often company commanders expect their XOs to draw on their experiences and determine their own priorities. But lieutenants receive virtually no training that prepares them to be company XOs, and company commanders are often far too busy to give their new XOs the specifics on what to do next.

During my two company commands, I had seven different company XOs. After several attempts to help these officers make the transition, I drafted a letter to the next one outlining his duties. All of the men who served in this capacity did a good job, but I wish I had done my own job better by giving them more help in their transition. If each man had received my description of his duties, along with an introduction and welcoming session, and followed by a detailed Officer Evaluation Report (OER) support form, I might have made their transitions easier.

Each unit is different, and each company commander has his own ideas about what his XO is supposed to

accomplish. The key idea is that he should spell it all out for the new XO. The following is a sample letter:

*Welcome to your new position as company XO. You arrive at this position having already earned my respect and trust. Continue to conduct yourself in the same professional manner I have observed, and you will be an outstanding XO. Contact me at any time. No doors in this company are closed to you, and I expect you to be interested in everything.*

*As the company XO, you are my second-in-command, and I want you to be an integral part of every aspect of the company. You and I and the first sergeant must work as a close unit if we are to be an effective command team. The purpose of this letter is to describe your primary duties.*

*You will work closely with the battalion XO. He is the second-in-command of the battalion, and you should view his directives in this light. He will task you to support the needs of the battalion. Remember to keep me informed of all taskings and to get me involved any time you do not consider them appropriate.*

*You will also work closely with the battalion staff officers and the section noncommissioned officers in charge. You should be their best ally. Although you take your orders only from me, you must have the trust and confidence of all the battalion's officers and NCOs. If any difference of opinion should arise as to what is best for our company, refer it to me for a final decision.*

*Whenever possible, involve the first sergeant in your dealings with the platoon sergeants and section NCOs. I want every NCO to know that I rely upon and support our first sergeant as the top noncommissioned officer in the company.*

*You will work closely with the platoon leaders. Make sure you are open to their comments and concerns. If the appropriate opportunity arises, you may find yourself coaching and teaching them. Never pretend you know what is going on if you don't. Make sure all the company officers are working together. We must have a team effort at every level.*

*We have a strong headquarters section, but it is going through some changes. In a short time, the commander, the XO, the first sergeant, the training NCO, and perhaps the NBC NCO will all have changed. The command inspection validated that we have solid programs in place for running the company. But I am counting on you to assume your duties quickly and become knowledgeable so there is no drop in performance. When working with the headquarters section personnel, keep the first sergeant informed of your intentions.*

*You are responsible for representing the company at several key meetings. The battalion training meeting is normally on Tuesdays at 0900, and the training NCO will attend with you. You must be familiar with the training support matrix and Annex C of the battalion training SOP. Also be familiar with*



the company's training schedules and calendar. The battalion XO and staff usually meet Wednesdays at 0900. Make sure our binder has all the appropriate information posted in it. Remember that you speak for me at these meetings. As soon as possible after a meeting, I will expect you to brief me, the first sergeant, and the training NCO or supply sergeant, if appropriate.

Other meetings I want you to attend are the company training meeting and the company commodity chiefs' meeting, normally held on Fridays. You are in charge of the latter meeting; see that the commodity chiefs are working on the right projects, and give them the appropriate priority for the coming week.

As a general rule, I want you to focus on areas that pertain to your responsibilities. Learn as much as you can from your predecessor; he has done a good job as XO. Additionally, I want you to be familiar with and understand the following:

- Your areas of responsibility in the dining facility.
- The supply room:
  - The supply SOP.
  - Master hand receipts, sub-hand receipts, component listing, shortage annex, temporary hand receipts, and issue documents.

- Self-service Supply Center (SSSC).
- Direct exchange.
- Clothing records.
- Procedures for absentee baggage.
- Procedures for reports of survey.
- Procedures for an inventory.
- The arms room:
  - The SOP.
  - Status of equipment.
- The motor pool.
  - Status of equipment.
  - SOP for services.
  - How to request parts.
- The training room.
  - Procedures for requesting terrain, ranges, ammunition, transportation, and aircraft.
  - Taskings from current battalion memorandums of instruction.
  - The unit status report.
  - Field SOP and reports.
- Policies for:
  - Crime prevention, physical security.
  - Safety.
  - Drug and alcohol.
  - Fire marshal (know how to test and turn off alarm).
  - Energy conservation.
  - All other additional duties.

I believe the company XO in this battalion has the most challenging job for a lieutenant and the most difficult one to do well. He is saddled with many responsibilities, has few assets with

which to accomplish his missions, and must compete against the needs and desires of others in the company.

In short, the XO's job requires a man who knows his own mind and can make his own way. I know you will do fine. Along the way, don't forget to make it fun. Seek me out any time you are not sure where you stand, and we will figure out what to do together.

Good luck in your new job!

After the XO has read your letter, ask him what he thinks about his job. Make sure he is not overwhelmed by it; assure him that you know there will be a learning process. See if there is anything he would like to add to or delete from the letter in regard to his duties. Give him suspenses for working through the tasks you have given him. Also, schedule a separate session in which to go over his OER support form with him. Remember that he may be the newest officer in the company and is working at a job the other company officers have not seen him perform. Make him feel like a welcome part of your team, and try to put him in a good light before the company and the battalion staff as soon as possible.

A letter such as the sample I have offered here will go a long way toward helping the new XO learn his new job quickly. It will ensure that he knows what you expect from him from the beginning. It will give him some idea of the effort required to do the job well. And it will help him begin to grasp the volume of work required. Finally, helping your new XO with his transition into his new duties will enable you to concentrate on commanding the entire company.

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